

1649
O.C.
1893
12000

HOME RULE.

A SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

NICHOLAS FLOOD DAVIN, Q.C., M.P.,

In Montreal on the 17th of May, 1893.

TORONTO:
HUNTER, ROSE AND COMPANY.
1893.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
Ontario Council of University Libraries

HOME RULE.

I am here to-night as a private citizen—not in a representative capacity. Indeed Home Rule is a subject in which most of my constituents take little interest, and most of those who take an interest in it are opposed to it. Those who are opposed to it have no animosity to Ireland. But they have not gone into the question, which is somewhat intricate and easily overlaid with false representations and fallacious suggestions. I am here for the purpose of manifesting my personal sympathy with the cause of Home Rule, for nothing but evil can come of the agitation against it, looking at the desperate form it has assumed. Such a spectacle as an ex-Prime Minister appealing to passions with arguments based on an order of things, which, whether he or anybody else likes it or not, belongs to the past, and openly inciting to something like rebellion, with the view of alarming the voters in England, has never before been seen in the three Kingdoms. I also wish to appeal to my Irish Protestant brethren. I am here as an Irish Protestant to say that no course could be so opposed to their interests as the one some of them are taking in regard to this question. Perhaps there is another reason, and it is a characteristically Irish one. There is some danger in the position. Because I dared to say a word on behalf of Home Rule, a hundred guns have been turned on me. But those persons misunderstand the character of Irishmen in Ireland and in Canada, who think they can, without calling forth chivalrous counter action, persecute a man because he says a word according to his lights for the country of his birth. If they think

Irish Protestants and Catholics will stand quietly by while a man who happened to say a word for Ireland on what here is after all only a speculative topic, is hounded down, they are greatly mistaken. The decree has, however, gone forth that because, without neglect of any duty as a Canadian, I had broken a lance for Ireland—had merely indicated that I would give Ireland what we have contended for and got for the North-West, I am to be politically killed. But threatened men live long, and my political execution would perhaps entail reprisals. I don't think a chivalrous race would look tamely on, and I might quote the old Cornish rhyme:

“And must Trelawny die,
And must Trelawny die,
Then thirty thousand Cornishmen
Will know the reason why,”

and I think there are more than thirty thousand Canadian men, who, if an inquisitorial dispensation, contrary to all the rights and principles and privileges, the spirit and soul of a free community, were dealt out to any public man, would resent it at the polls.

I plead for Home Rule in the interest of the British Empire. Everybody knows the bitter anti-British feelings entertained by a whole nation of Irishmen in the United States. Everybody must feel that a discontented Ireland is a source of weakness, whereas Ireland ought to be the right hand of England. Already, with the prospect of the triumph of Home Rule, that bitter feeling among the Irish in the States has been greatly toned down. With Ireland at rest, and the millions of Irishmen in America ceasing in some instances to be hostile to England, and in other cases becoming friendly—will not the Empire be stronger? I say, then, I plead for Home Rule in the interest of the British Empire.

As between a free centralized Government and a federal, perhaps I should myself prefer the free centralized Government if it were successful. But any form of Government before it can be

allowed to rest unchallenged must succeed. One person will prefer an aristocracy, another a monarchy, another a democracy—this man a unitary, that man a federal Government—but when we come to practical, everyday life, each form must stand or fall by the test of success. An individual may fail, and yet have more merit than his successful rival, but a watch, however handsome the case, however famous the maker, which does not indicate the time correctly, is a nuisance, and a Government or a form of Government which does not succeed in governing, which does not get the confidence of the people, stands condemned.

The Union has been a miserable failure. It was made under such auspices that God and man forbade the bands; under such conditions, and with such attendant treachery, that it was doomed to miserable incompleteness. Its history, up to the time of Mr. Gladstone's remedial legislation, was a weary record of reiterated coercion acts, of uprisings, whiteboyism and Fenianism; of injustice and oppression. It is a favorite fallacy to represent Home Rule as aiming at the repeal of this Union, at separation, and as a step towards the dismemberment of the empire. Nothing could be more astray, more false, more misleading. You might as well say that a doctor who seeks to heal a wound, or a sprain, or extract a bullet from a leg, is engaged in an act of amputation. Is he not rather guarding against amputation? You have the Union. It has failed. It has not worked. Home Rule is an attempt to make it workable, by introducing a principle which has been found successful in the United States and in Canada—the principle of local self-government. Self-government seems to be essential to the well-being of all English-speaking men. I have heard a distinguished British officer, who had lived much in Russia, say that despotism qualified by assassination was a very good government and suited the Slavs. It may actually be better for them in their present stage than free institutions would be, but a

little more enlightenment, a few more generations, and we shall find the Slav calling for self-government too. The North-West Territories have not yet been organized into a province. We have, as yet, a sparse population. In the early days, we were wholly governed from Ottawa through a Lieutenant-Governor. We were free. We had trial by jury. We had practically all millions have to-day in Ireland; and, with representation in the Dominion Parliament, we had all, and more than all, they have to-day in Ireland. Our position as free citizens of the Dominion was complete; yet we were discontented because we had not the management of our own local affairs. We were only a handful of people; very few Irishmen; mostly men from Ontario and the lower provinces, with a sprinkling of Englishmen; yet for a slight reason, because of mistakes made by the Federal Government, through ignorance and distance, I have heard these men use strong, rebellious language. We have had many concessions; in fact, nearly everything; but we will never be content until we have all the privileges of a province. To-day we have in that western country—the home of the buffalo ten or twelve years ago—more control over our local affairs than the millions of the people of Ireland.

The representatives of the people of Ireland as a fact have no share in the government of her internal affairs. Since the union only two or three Irishmen have been members of the Imperial Cabinet. Up to 1886 there were two great political parties in Ireland, both equally opposed to the regulation of internal affairs in that manner which the great mass of the people of Ireland desired. Ireland as Ireland was divided into Nationalists hostile to every Government, and a party which might be called a Government party, which supported every Government and which looked on itself—ominous words!—as the English garrison in Ireland. Just as with us a few years ago in the North-West, the whole

administration centred in the Lieutenant-Governor and the Minister of the Interior—a state of things against which the people fumed and agitated—so to-day in Ireland, the whole administration centres in the Lord Lieutenant and the Chief Secretary. When Swift asked why he should wait for an audience of Lord Carteret, when he had nothing to ask and was afraid of nobody, that learned and witty and wise statesman—then Lord Lieutenant—replied :—

My very good Dean, there are few who come here,
But have something to ask for or something to fear.”

And the completeness of centralized power in the Castle has given a dark arbitrary character to the Government of Ireland. Just as the Lieut.-Governor of the North-West used to be vested with all the functions discharged in the other provinces by the First Minister and three or four colleagues, so to-day in Ireland the duties which are discharged in England by the Home Secretary, the President of the Local Board, the Education Department and the Privy Council, are all in Ireland dealt with from the Castle. The police, which in England are provided by the municipalities, are all directed from the Castle. The magistrates, stipendiary and otherwise, are all appointed from the Castle. The minuteness of its action when analysed gives results very like absolute monarchies—and look at the effect on Government. When a magistrate or a policeman does anything wrong or unpopular, the odium settles on the Castle. Can you be surprised that such a system has failed to be popular, failed to get the confidence of the people? The confidence of the people! Why it is a Government founded on distrust.

To account for the restiveness of Irishmen under a Government of this sort, a Government against which Canadians would break out in open rebellion, it is said the Irishman is a difficult,

dangerous, incorrigible, excitable, ungovernable person. Does a change of climate affect him as it affects no other man? In Canada and in the United States, among our best citizens are Irishmen and the descendants of Irishmen. Some of the most successful and amiable men in every centre of population on this continent are Irishmen—peaceable, public spirited, exemplary citizens. How comes it that this man, so successful, so useful, so attractive even, everywhere else, is in Ireland an incorrigible monster, unmanageable, insurrectionary, rebellious? If we admit the truth of the charge, must there not be a local reason quite outside the man's character? That Irishmen have been discontented is true. That they are incorrigible, dangerous and rebellious by nature is false. But when one nation conquers another and oppresses it, the conqueror does not stop there; he gets hireling pens to traduce and caricature the objects of his oppression, and Irishmen have been traduced and caricatured so, that up to a recent period some persons believed they had tails. Even to-day, look at the brutal jaw *Punch* and *Puck* have been and are accustomed to give their Irishmen, though there are few races as handsome as the Irish Celts.

It is a less grave offence to caricature a question, and this question of Home Rule has been grossly misrepresented by Mr. Chamberlain, by Lord Salisbury and Mr. Balfour. But a great deal has been spoken and written about it out of ignorant dislike, which exhibits as much breadth as a Harlem flat—(I have just returned from New York)—where a dog, I am told, moves his tail up and down, does not dare to wag it sideways, for he is afraid of his life or his tail that he will strike the walls. The question, as stated by the opponents of Home Rule, is stated falsely. This is not an attempt to repeal the Union, but to make that Union workable, and therefore a more complete Union than it has proved, and therefore, far from looking to separation it looks

towards a real Union, held together not by force but drawn closer every day by sentiment.

When you ask why this Union has not worked, you are face to face with sentiment and with utility—you find the Union in its present form takes no note of a great leading characteristic of the Irish people, and also that it has been a bar in the way of the country's material development, in three ways; it encouraged and fostered the existence of oppression and an oppressive class; it has rendered the construction of great commercial works expensive; it affords no means whereby special attention may be given by persons on the spot to expedients for the development of the resources of the country.

We have in Ireland a national sentiment. There it is. I am not now discussing the question, whether it is good that it is there or not; say it is—say it is not—I don't care which. But as a fact there it is and it has to be dealt with. All that tyranny could devise has been used to break down the national spirit, but, like the shamrock, the nation's emblem, the more it was trodden on, the more it grew. The old Irish tongue—the Erse—has been destroyed, but the national spirit seems indestructible. In the United States we see it living on in families for generations. The Irishman is as weak as other men; as passionate, perhaps more passionate than other men; but no blandishments and no temptations have been able to wean him from national attachment. Prior to the great emigrations across the Atlantic, the cream of the Irish people was skimmed away; the old Celtic gentry were forced from their seats; the natural leaders of the people were driven out by the penal laws to find employment in France and Spain, and Austria and Italy; to fight under Catinat, on fields where their forefathers fought under Hannibal two thousand years before; to rise and shine at Versailles and at Saint Ildefonso; to distinguish themselves in the rival armies of Frederick and of

Maria Theresa ; to become Marshals of France and Ministers of Spain. Still, the rank and file bereft though they were of leaders ; helpless ; up to the other day oppressed with the most cruel oppression ; up to little more than a generation ago embruted with ignorance ; resisted all efforts to crush the national spirit. This national spirit is a fact then that must be dealt with ; it will not down ; and any system of government which deprives it of scope is defective and doomed to failure. The Castle, with its immense power politically, socially ; a widowed Capital ; oppression ; poverty—all have been in vain. The elder Lord Lytton, writing of that Irishman who still stands foremost among philosophical statesmen—Edmund Burke, says :

“ And oh ! what sap must through that genius run !
 What hold on earth ! what yearning towards the sun !
 Which met by granite upward cleaves its way,
 And high o'er forests bathes its crest in day.”

Language almost identical might be applied to the national sentiment in Irishmen, rooted in love of country, in pride of race, in national self-respect, and striking up through and over all obstacles, to assert itself and claim recognition among mankind. I say this national sentiment is a fact, and Home Rule, recognizing it and giving it scope, will tend to make the Union workable.

Now look at the business side—the Utilitarian aspect of Home Rule. To construct the smallest public work you have now to go across the Channel, appear before Committees of the House of Lords and of the House of Commons, and give enormous fees to London lawyers. Is this sensible ? Is it defensible for a moment ? A director of the Cork and Bandon Railway declared that the cost of getting the Bill through the Parliamentary Committees in London, was equal to the cost of building the road. Consider how much in this last seventy years of material development such a state of things must have kept the country behind.

A local parliament is required for local emergencies, and specially local works. The effects of local legislation in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, and the extraordinary impetus to the country's prosperity imparted by Grattan's triumph in 1782, indicate the effect Home Rule is likely to have on material development and commercial prosperity. Why Ulster and the great commercial capital of the North should be alarmed it is hard to understand. No law can be passed which will retard their progress, and if the remainder of Ireland should grow more prosperous, must not the prosperity of the North be enhanced?

It is worth remembering that the Irish question once out of the road, the Parliament at Westminster will have some time to devote to English and Imperial affairs. Now a word as to objections. I saw that Mr. Balfour said the bill of Mr. Gladstone does not give back to the Irish what they had before the Union, but something very different. I should think so indeed. The Irish parliament was a parliament of privilege and placemen, a thing that had only a name to live up to 1782, and even after that time had no claim to be considered a free representative Government of the Irish people. Home Rule recognizes that Ireland in common with Great Britain is governed by a free parliament, but proposes for local purposes to give the Irish people a parliament that shall be thoroughly representative.

Are the Protestants of the north in danger? I deny this altogether. In the earliest clauses of the bill is one providing specially for the safe-guarding of the religious freedom of the minority and all that pertains thereto. No man of sense, certainly no man who has had an opportunity for a wide observation of politics, can entertain the opinion for a moment that when that legislature meets in Dublin, the representatives from the Centre and South of Ireland will not divide into parties. Divide they certainly will, and then the North will exercise a great, a dispro-

portionate power, a power that would have been still further enhanced if, instead of opposing, they had fallen in with the movement.

As an Irish Protestant, and one with friends among the landlord class as among other classes, I greatly regret the opposition to Home Rule. It is worse than a crime, as the Lord Derby of Reform Bill days said—it is a blunder. The Protestant gentry might have placed themselves at the head of the Home Rule movement. Their aid and leadership would have been joyfully accepted. They would have got all the credit of its success. They would have been identified with it. Their action would have tended to bridge the chasm of estrangement between them and the mass of the people. But without counting the cost they have set themselves against it. Other and very different leaders have been developed. Home Rule will be carried in spite of this opposition, and, what with the memories of their oppressions, of their resistance to every popular measure, especially their resistance to the disestablishment of the church, the agrarian legislation of Mr. Gladstone, and Home Rule, they will be left absolutely without influence over the people.

The policy will triumph. If Moses does not take the people across Jordan, some Joshua will. There is no instance in history of a question brought to the ripeness of this one and then fading away. This policy must triumph, now; and for three reasons. You cannot bring a question to the position Home Rule occupies without having convinced more than half a nation, more than half an empire, a majority of the civilized world, that justice is on its side. There is, as a fact, a majority in favor of Home Rule in the three kingdoms, but the majority among English-speaking men in the United States and throughout "Great Britain" is overwhelming. Therefore the strongest motive for upholding it is rooted in more than half a generation of men in the three king-

doms, sure to influence at least as many coming after them should this be necessary. Then, it is a law that an aggressive movement increases in weight and momentum, while the defence of a position has a tendency to grow slack and falter. Third point,—it is by questions politicians rise. Without questions, a politician is almost like a man breathing in a vacuum. In Roman times the ambitious young patrician or the plebeian lawyer was as glad to get a plundering pro-consul to impeach as a zealous young surgeon is of finding a subject to dissect; and with us a question is a *sine qua non* for an ambitious, struggling politician; so that should Mr. Gladstone pass away, as those foolish and malignant fashionable people who have just disgraced themselves by hooting and hissing the greatest and most venerable figure at this moment among mankind—no doubt pray—and Sir William Vernon Harcourt die or prove too feeble, an aspiring spirit, would be sure to rise and lay hold of so inviting a lever for his ambition; therefore the policy must triumph. As it must triumph, how foolish for the Irish Protestant gentry and others of my brother Irish Protestants to stand apart from the living stream of Irish political life.

Ulster is sometimes pointed to as an instance of a portion of Ireland prosperous and content under the Union. Yes, prosperous because contented. And why has Ulster been contented? Because long before Gladstone's land bills were thought of, Ulster had tenant right, and the majority, for reasons not necessary to enter into here, came to be well satisfied with the Union—but the other portions of Ireland, where the tenant was at the mercy of oppression until the other day, and whether in part or in whole, on this account, differing in sentiment, and being discontented, need a modification of the Union to produce that content, which in their case, too, will, I believe, be the harbinger of prosperity and peace.

Now, I must say, it is singularly unfortunate in Ireland and here, that people who dislike Home Rule have only begun to fight it vigorously when it is on the point of triumphing. Here in Canada we have men who voted for memorials to Mr. Gladstone, when that statesman was opposed to it. They sent messages across the Atlantic, praying unwilling Prime Ministers to grant Home Rule, and even those who voted against the motion supported Sir John Macdonald, who voted for it. But now, when Gladstone is doing what they asked him, some get wild, others zealously hostile; they use violent language; and though earls, whose ancestors came over with the Conqueror, and, I am told, princes of the blood, and our Governor-General in the near future, are Home Rulers, these people are almost ready to rebel, and, no doubt, they will, especially after dinner, fight—in similes, and will bleed—in metaphor—and die—in song. We know with what characteristic vigour Mr. Gladstone fought against Home Rule. When he was shouting, like his own Achilles, striking right and left,

“ In the hot-lit foreground of the fight,”

many of those who are now so very energetic against him were supine in their hostility to Home Rule. What would be thought of the general, who, when a ship is approaching a harbor, and the governor of the town cries out to him to open fire on the strange craft, remains supine—who still remains supine while she is passing the narrows—but who, when she has passed within the harbour, and is welcomed by the governor as a friendly vessel, and is well protected by batteries, opens a vigorous fire? But what shall we say of those who, when the ship was becalmed, prayed for a favorable breeze, and long after the breeze sprang up—no doubt in answer to their prayers—ordered frigates to give chase, but only then when the glass reveals her—a tower of sail—about, having successfully weathered wind and wave, to enter port?

The policy will certainly succeed and the union be made a real union. Instead of a frowned-at flag we shall see a welcomed imperial ensign bearing its triple cross waving in those changeful, beautiful skies, which have looked down on the blood and tears of centuries; emblematic of the self-respect of those who walk beneath it, while representing the power, pomp and circumstance of nations—of an empire built up alike by Irishmen, Scotchmen, and Englishmen—an empire stretching into every zone and every clime, of which there is scarcely a spot where, if you woke the dead, side by side with English and Scotch, Irish heroes, who fought and bled and died for this British Empire, would not start to life; and under Home Rule, under self-government, embodying at once national aspirations and proved ideas of utility in governing men—throughout a satisfied Ireland—a new impulse shall be given to industry, to enterprise, to commerce, to art; hope shall bloom where despair shivered; content smile where brooding care pursed the brow; in those desolate halls of old renown the mute harp of centuries will be vibrant again, and Justice walk abroad like a sceptred king with Mercy crowned as queen.

I beg, Sir, to move the following resolution :—

“That this meeting, recognising the advantages and privileges of citizenship in the British Empire, rejoices at the prospect of the success of a policy which, by giving those advantages and privileges in a form acceptable to the ideas and aspiration of millions of men, will ensure the peace and prosperity of Ireland, and cement and strengthen the Empire of which that country forms so important a part.”

